

BELL FAMILY PAPERS
1796-1927

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INTRODUCTION

The Bell Family Papers, 1796-1927, were donated to the Tennessee State Library and Archives by Dr. W. A. Bell, of Dickson, Tennessee, in 1956. The collection occupies 1.26 linear feet of shelf space and numbers approximately 500 items. Literary rights in the unpublished writings in the bell family Papers have been dedicated to the public. Single copies of the unpublished writings may be made for individual or scholarly purposes.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Bell Family Papers consisting of approximately 500 items dated 1796-1927 are include correspondence, accounts, deeds, inventories of estates, records of the Cloverdale Seminary, and an autograph album of Mary Bell that she kept while she attended Ward Seminary, 1881-1883.

The Bell family, originally from Ireland, emigrated from England to the United States during the period 1810 to about 1834. Some members of the family may have emigrated earlier or later but these are the dates that can be determined from the papers. The first of the family to come to the United States was John Bell. It is not known exactly when he entered the United States but in July 1811 he was writing from Richmond, Virginia, where he was engaged in business, to his brother Walter in London, about the desirability of his coming to America and settling in "some part of that extensive valley between the Blueridge and Allegheny mountains." Prior to their emigration, John, William, and Walter Bell were business partners in London, England. They had been forced out of Ireland for having taken part in the Irish rebellion. Some of their business accounts of the London firm and the papers dealing with the dissolution of their English partnership are among the papers. Members of brother William's family settled in Pittsburgh and vicinity where the they engaged in the iron business. Walter Bell's family emigrated in November 1811 and after several years in Virginia moved in 1820 to Tennessee near Charlotte where they also engaged in the iron business and farming. These papers were preserved by the descendants of Walter Bell and deal with this family primarily.

The last member of the family to emigrate from Ireland was a sister of John, William, and Walter who had married a Williams. She, her husband, and several of her children and grandchildren came in 1834 and settled in Ohio near Cincinnati.

John Bell, son of Walter Bell and nephew of the first emigrant by that name, came to America in 1810 and joined his uncle's family in Richmond where he attended school for a while in preparation for a business career with his uncle.

The largest portion of the papers is made up of the correspondence of this John with his sister, Anne Jane. In one of his letters written in 1866, John reminisced about the forced expatriation and exile of his father as a rebel in arms against the government and about the

death of his mother in Ireland. He wrote affectionately of the aunt who had cared for them after the death of their mother. This is the only evidence in the papers that Walter Bell married twice and it is not known whether all the children who emigrated with this

family were the children of the first wife. The family consisted of John, Anne Jane, Sarah (often spoken of as Sally), Caroline, Margaret, William, Mary, and Walter (who died young). The second wife, Anne Bryan Bell, was loved by all the children as mother and with the exception of this one reference it would never be suspected that she was not the real mother of them all. She and her husband both died within a week of each other at their Cloverdale home near Charlotte, Tennessee, in 1840.

The more than sixty letters in the collection written by John Bell to his sister, Anne Jane, and a few to other members of the family are worthy of special note. The first letter written April 8, 1811, to his sister in Monaghan, Ireland, contains a description of Richmond, Petersburg, Trenton, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington City. He commented that the grass was not green the year round as in Ireland. He listed the subjects he was studying in school.

By December 1811, John was writing to his sister at Norfolk where she arrived with the other members of the family. For several years after February 1812 there are no letters from John. In 1817 there is one from Italy and in 1820 Uncle John wrote Anne Jane that her brother was in Paris and expected to return home soon. He had spent several years in Europe studying medicine. In 1821 Dr. John Bell paid his family a visit at their home in Tennessee. It appears to have been the only time that he was ever in Tennessee.

He wrote on May 24, 1821, from Wheeling, Virginia, that he was on his way to Tennessee and would go by way of Frankfort, Lexington, Louisville, and perhaps St. Louis. He stated that would not be able to stay very long as his uncle was exceedingly impatient for him to return to Philadelphia and get settled in his practice of medicine. In Lexington he stayed with the President of Transylvania College and witnessed their annual commencement. In an autobiography of Dr. John Bell in the holdings of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress (the Tennessee State Library and Archives has it on microfilm) there is a rather detailed account of this trip of Dr. Bell to Tennessee. A letter of his dated May 9, 1866, stated that he had been urged by the Pennsylvania Colonization Society to let them have, for deposit in the archives, an autobiography or at least a sketch of his active life with some reminiscences of early emigrants. His portrait had been done by Sully. The autobiography contains some interesting comments and valuable information about Tennessee in 1821. He visited another Bell, not related as far as he knew, who was also an ironmaster. He was amazed at the use of iron plated and other iron utensils in this household. (Possibly Montgomery Bell's.

The letters of Dr. John Bell after his return to Philadelphia are filled with medical advice, information about diseases, such as cholera and small pox, his medical pupils, lectures at the Philadelphia Medical Institute, lectures on anatomy for the Academy of Fine Arts, translation of French medical work, and his concern for the education of his younger

brother and his sisters. John Bell belonged to the College of Physicians and the Kappa Lambda Medical Society and was one of the editors of the *Journal of Health*.

In 1826 Anne Jane accepted a teaching position in Nashville with Mrs. Scott. The salary was low but Dr. John wrote that she had done right to accept it and that it was as much as he had made during the first year of his practice. He was never financially well

off and was forced to give up his home after the Civil War when he could not meet the payments on the mortgage. He married Phoebe Israel in 1841, and they had one daughter, Mary.

Anne Jane was at home in 1828 teaching the younger members of the family. In this she had encouragement from her brother, John. In 1833, William went to school in Philadelphia sent by John. He returned to Charlotte in April 1836 to take over some of the responsibilities of the furnaces and the farm as his father was in failing health. In March 1837 Anne Jane visited her brother in Philadelphia. On her way she saw Andrew Jackson in Cincinnati and commented on how sick he looked. She married her cousin, Samuel Bell, a widower with several children, and went to live at Cornplanter, Vernango County, Pennsylvania, in November 1837. Her husband died in 1842 and in 1843 Anne Jane returned to live with her family at Cloverdale. In a short time she began teaching in the school which was being run by her brother, William, known as Cloverdale Seminary. although this school was never chartered it continued until 1900. After William's death in 1876 it was run by his son, Walter. There are two classbooks for 1883 and 1884 together with announcements and commencement programs from 1873 to 1900 in the collection.

This account of the Bell Family Papers would not be complete without some mention of William's letters, especially the forty-two written to his wife, Emma Caldwell Bell of Clarksville, Tennessee, during the time that he was a prisoner of war, 1863-1865, at Camp Morton, Indiana. On November 29, 1864, William wrote Emma that, as an honorable man, he could not conscientiously take the oath of allegiance. He returned home in 1865 after his release from prison.

There are some letters written as late as 1927 by members of the Bell family or to members of the family, some of whom still live in Charlotte, Tennessee, but the importance of the collection lies with the materials for the earlier period.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Dr. John Bell

- ca. 1795 Born in Ireland. Parents were Walter Bell and first wife whose name is unknown.
- 1810 Emigrated from England.
- 1811 Attended school in Richmond.
- 1815 In school at the University of Philadelphia.
- 1817-1820 Studied medicine in Europe.
- 1821 Visited family in Charlotte. Traveled via Lexington, Kentucky, and attended commencement at Transylvania College.
- 1822-1875 Practiced medicine in Philadelphia.
- 1826 Translated French medical work.
- 1829-ca. 1860 Lecturer in the Philadelphia Medical Institute; taught medical jurisprudence; taught anatomy at the Academy of Fine Arts; member of the College of Physicians; member of Kappa Lambda Medical Society; one of the editors of the *Journal of Health*.
- 1841 Married Phoebe Israel--one daughter, Mary, born in 1844.
- ca. 1875 Died in Philadelphia.

William Blackburn Bell

- 1818 Born December 24, 1818, son of Walter Bell and Anne Bryan Bell.
- 1833-1836 Attended school in Philadelphia.
- 1837 Attended to running of the farm and furnaces at Cloverdale.
- ca. 1843 Began school that later became Cloverdale Seminary.
- 1861-1862 Served in the Confederate Army, company B, 10th Cavalry Regiment.
- 1863-1865 Confederate prisoner of War at Camp Morton, Indiana.

- 1866-1876 Principal of Cloverdale Seminary.
- 1876 April 12, died at Cloverdale, Dickson County, Tennessee.

Walter Abriam Bell

- 1856 Born November 3, at Cloverdale, Dickson County, Tennessee, son of William Blackburn and Emma Caldwell Bell.
- Attended Cloverdale Seminary.
- 1876-1901 Headmaster at Cloverdale Seminary until it closed.
- Founded the town of Vanleer, Tennessee
- 1903-1907 State Senator from Dickson, Humphreys, Houston, and Stewart Counties. Chairman of the Finance Committee of Dickson County. Member of Masonic Lodge; Knights of Pythias; and Odd Fellows.
- 1911 Died November 17, at Cloverdale, Dickson County, Tennessee.

CONTAINER LIST

BOX 1

1. Correspondence--Anne Jane Bell (18), 1826-1841
2. Correspondence--Annie Bell (1), 1856
3. Correspondence--Caroline D. Bell (3), 1828-1838
4. Correspondence--John Bell (2), 1811
5. Correspondence--Dr. John Bell (17), 1811-1827
6. Correspondence-- Dr. John Bell (14), 1828-1831
7. Correspondence-- Dr. John Bell (15), 1832-1836
8. Correspondence-- Dr. John Bell (15), 1837-1867
9. Correspondence--M. E. Bell (1), 1840
10. Correspondence--Margaret V. Bell (8), 1838-1866
11. Correspondence--Mary Bell (3), 1854-1857
12. Correspondence--Mary Anne Bell (1), 1817
13. Correspondence--Phoebe Bell (2), 1841-1844
14. Correspondence--Sarah B. Bell (11), 1837-1844
15. Correspondence--Theodore A. Bell (5), 1848-1868
16. Correspondence--Walter A. Bell (5), 1875-1888
17. Correspondence--William Bell (brother of Samuel) (12), 1842-1849
18. Correspondence--William Bell, Sr. (1), 1810
19. Correspondence--William B. Bell (4), 1838-1840
20. Correspondence--William B. Bell (42), 1863-1865
21. Correspondence--William B. Bell (10), 1866-1875

BOX 2

1. Correspondence--Alice Bell (4), 1864-1866, Shelbyville during the Civil War
2. Correspondence--Mary C. Bell (7), 1864, Shelbyville
3. Correspondence--Bell relatives (22), 1810-1912
4. Correspondence--Caldwell relatives (5), 1866-1876
5. Correspondence--Quint relatives (6), 1817-1844
6. Correspondence--Eliza Bell Smith (7), 1818-1843
7. Correspondence--M. R. Stuart (5), 1826-1843
8. Correspondence--C. W. Trousdale to Miss Birdie Russwurm (13), 1888-1898
9. Correspondence--Wales relatives (2), 1824-1840
10. Correspondence--Walker relatives (9), 1852-1894
11. Correspondence--John Williams (5), 1812-1832
12. Correspondence--Williams relatives (4), 1810-1865
13. Correspondence--William Williams (8), 1822-1855
14. Correspondence--Friends of the Bells (17), 1796-1927
15. Correspondence--General (26), 1859-1927

BOX 3

1. Accounts--1810-1924--Early accounts of William and John Bell, London, England, 1810-1812
2. Autograph album--Mary Bell, Ward Seminary, 1881-1883
3. Biographical and genealogical data
4. Contracts--1846-1874; Deeds--1866
5. Dissolution of partnership--1811
6. Estates: Samuel Bell--1843; Walter Bell--1841
7. Invitations--1857-1901
8. Memorabilia
9. Notices and advertisements
10. Receipts--1841-1859
11. Receipts: Confederate States et al--1863-1866
12. School records: Cloverdale Seminary Classbooks--1883-1884
13. School records: Cloverdale Seminary--1844-1873
14. School records: Cloverdale Seminary--programs and notices--1844-1900
15. Slave deeds--1846-1857
16. Stamps